

Section III - Peace Movement, Nuclear Disarmament, and the Future

Chapter 1. Opposition to Nuclear Armament (late 1950s-90s)

The National and International Debate

After installation of the missile silos in the farm fields of South Dakota's Western Plains, the missiles went largely unnoticed. Housed underground, the missiles were largely inconspicuous. By the end of 1963 three Strategic Missile Squadrons (SMS) each with five flights of ten Minuteman missiles stood on alert across 13,500 square miles of the Western Plains of South Dakota.ⁱ Additional Minuteman missiles in Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska formed a vital component of the United States' nuclear deterrent force.

In the early days of Minuteman facility construction and deployment, discussion about the implications of the mass deployment of nuclear missiles in American communities remained minimal. Most residents generally accepted the nearby missile sites, and whether driven by patriotism, lack of information, indifference, fear of the missiles themselves, or preoccupation with daily life, local residents mostly ignored the missile presence. According to one North Dakota resident, Jody McLaughlin, people "chose not to know. The attitude was, 'I don't want to think about it. I don't want to talk about it or acknowledge it.'"ⁱⁱ Organized opposition to the placement of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) from local residents during this period was virtually nonexistent.ⁱⁱⁱ

Not everyone accepted the presence of nuclear missiles, however. Acts of resistance against America's nuclear defense program began in the late 1950s and included both solitary protests and organized groups. Individual protests tended to be carried out by local residents, while the early group actions were typically organized by national groups. In 1958 a lone protestor held an anti-nuclear/peace sign at the dedication of F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming, as an Atlas site.

An early group action occurred in Cheyenne when the Committee for Non-violent Action, a Philadelphia-based group, mounted a consciousness-raising campaign in the summer of 1958, which sought to stop the construction of Atlas missile sites in the Cheyenne area. The campaign, dubbed "Appeal to Cheyenne," sought to encourage local residents to oppose the construction of the new Atlas site at the F.E. Warren Air Force Base and to raise the level of public awareness and concern about nuclear weapons.^{iv} Additional campaigns mounted against the missile silo sites and the United States nuclear arsenal included actions by the War Resisters League. In 1959 this group's "Omaha Action" drew national attention to the early Atlas ICBM deployment in Nebraska. The War Resisters League distributed pamphlets encouraging Nebraskans and others to protest nuclear weapons.

The intensity of anti-nuclear activism varied depending on the political climate. Public debate over nuclear weapons in America

remained virtually nonexistent during much of the 1960s. The signing of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1963 appeared to reduce the public's concern over the nuclear weapons issue, as nuclear testing went underground. Nuclear weapons development and testing continued unabated, however—the United States conducted more tests in the five years after the test ban treaty than the five years before its signing—the perception of the nuclear threat lost its immediacy.^v From the mid-1960s until the early 1970s, many local and national peace groups shifted their focus, concentrating instead on the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. The anti-nuclear movement was not reinvigorated until the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Europe and the United States experienced a resurgence of concern over nuclear weapons.^{vi}

In Europe the renewed activism centered on anxiety over the arms build-up during the Reagan administration and the proposed deployment by the United States of short and medium range nuclear missiles in continental Europe. These anxieties sparked numerous European protests against the arms race that helped inspire the dormant American anti-nuclear movement.^{vii}

Activists in the United States shared the European's concerns over the nuclear deployments in Europe. Greater public concern in the United States over nuclear missile silos also coincided with the emergence of the nuclear freeze movement, which attracted strong support in the United States.^{viii} The height of this movement, from 1982 to 1987, encompassed the years of Ronald Reagan's presidency and the years when the United States and the Soviet Union entered a period of renewed tensions, which included a new emphasis on production and deployment of nuclear weapons. This period saw the renewed activity of the national peace movement, as well as the formation of anti-nuclear groups at the state and local levels. For example, the South Dakota Peace and Justice Center, which had been established in 1979, became active in protesting the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This group organized events at Ellsworth Air Force Base and at specific silos to "protest the nuclear arms race."^{ix}

The reaction of Allen and Lindy Kirkbride, ranchers near Cheyenne who had three MX missile silos on their sixty-five thousand-acre ranch, illustrates the increased public awareness concerning nuclear missiles during this period. The couple played reluctant hosts to the new MX ICBMs, developed in the 1980s by the United States in response to the increasing accuracy of the Soviet ICBMs. Allen Kirkbride, speaking to *USA Today* in 1986, said of the new MX ICBMs on his land "I sit here, and I think I'm in Utopia...[It] really chaps me when one of our elected public officials begs to get one of these projects in my backyard." Lindy Kirkbride equated having the missile silos in her backyard with being kicked by a horse.^x Her husband's sentiments also illustrate divisions between state politicians, who saw the economic activity brought by the increased military presence as beneficial, and the negative views of some of the ranchers who lived beside the missiles.^{xi}

The number and scope of missile silo actions increased in the 1980s as the anti-nuclear/peace movement gained momentum. Anxiety over new missile systems, such as the mobile MX missile, drew 400 people to an anti-MX rally at silo Q5 outside of Cheyenne, Wyoming, in the late 1980s. The furor over the MX deployments focused attention back on the

Minuteman as well. Peace actions occurred at Minuteman II and III missile sites in Colorado, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming during this period. Though no two were alike, protests typically involved vigils, praying at the site or on the silo cover, trespassing, damaging the surface installations by either hammering on the covers or pouring blood on the site to produce a symbolic disarming, or the delivering of statements from the activist to the military. Such statements commonly referred to international laws, such as the Geneva Convention, which bars attacks on civilians, and the Nuremberg Charter, which bans attempts to annihilate whole populations, as the rationale for disarmament. The activists argued that since the effects of nuclear weapons cannot be limited or controlled that they will harm civilians, thus violating these international laws.^{xii}

Although a number of anti-nuclear/peace activist groups were based on the east or west coasts, individuals from around the country participated in actions at the missile sites. One such action, performed by members of a Ploughshares group known as the Silo Pruning Hooks, involved people from Wisconsin and Minnesota. The activism of Ploughshares organizations is based on religious convictions that oppose war. The Silo Pruning Hooks members were two Catholic priests, a writer, and a mental health worker. Their action, performed in 1984, involved breaking into silo N-05 in Missouri by cutting the fence around the silo site, hammering on the silo cap with sledge hammers and jack hammers, and hanging a banner on the gate that read "Why do you do this evil thing? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the earth."^{xiii}

The activities of the Silo Pruning Hooks group raised the level of awareness about existing Minuteman sites at a time when the majority of public attention focused on the possible deployment of the MX mobile ICBM. For members of the Silo Pruning Hooks, the potential dangers and destructive power of the nuclear missiles justified their actions^{xiv}

The actions of members of the Silo Pruning Hooks inspired other groups like Nukewatch, based in Luck, Wisconsin, to undertake consciousness-raising projects of their own. Nukewatch's Missile Silo Project, which resulted in the mapping of one thousand missile silo sites across the country, was intended to be a high profile project capable of furthering public discussion on nuclear weapons. Jay Davis, a local peace activist, participated in the mapping of the rural missile sites in South Dakota and described an encounter with Air Force security personnel at a missile silo,

" . . . eventually we came to a missile silo right near State Highway 34 and there was a semi truck backed up right onto the pad inside the perimeter of the fence and there were a couple of soldiers, from the Air Force I suppose, with machine guns guarding the missile silo and the semi truck. And we stopped there and, I mean, it was obvious they weren't unloading furniture and this one soldier with the machine gun came over to my car as I was writing down the directions to that silo and also giving it a name and he said, can I help you with anything when I rolled down the window. And I said no thanks we're just tourists. And of course he knew we weren't tourists, but the point was we had a right to be out there driving on the back roads

whatever it was we were doing this is supposed to be a free country."^{xv}

During the mapping of the missile sites in South Dakota, Delta-01 was assigned the name of "Mike and Beth's Launch Control Center" after Mike Sprong and Beth Preheim, peace activists that mapped the Delta Flight. Delta-09 was believed to be assigned the name "Cassandra's Missile" for Cassandra Dixon, a peace activist with Nukewatch.^{xvi}

Nukewatch published the book, *Nuclear Heartland*, which mapped missile silo sites by state and provided an overview of the history of ICBM deployment and the development of national and local resistance movements. As stated by Sam Day, founder of Nukewatch, in the introduction to *Nuclear Heartland*, the goal of this project was to raise awareness and spark a critical debate of the dangers of the continued presence of these weapons and the real threat of a nuclear war. The organization also hoped their maps and information might prompt public visits to the sites by concerned citizens, other activists, or even vacationers.^{xvii}

Throughout the protests of the 1970s and 1980s, relations between the protestors and the military personnel guarding the silo sites largely remained professional and civilized. Young guards often displayed some nervousness around the activists, perhaps because they didn't know what to expect. Protests were often planned and announced in advance, which contributed to a more controlled response from both sides of the protest line.^{xviii} In the words of John LaForge, an activist with Nukewatch, "the people [guards] in charge generally understood that we weren't a threat to them."^{xix} A level of understanding seems to have been reached between the guards and protestors at most actions. For example, LaForge relates a story that happened during a protest at a missile silo site on Martin Luther King's birthday in the early 1980s, "I was in custody [and] our protest was on a Martin Luther King Birthday, this was before it was made a national holiday, and we all had Dr. King buttons on and I was in the Air Force squad in the back with the cuffs behind my back and one of the MPs asked me if he could have the button and I just thought that was a nice breakthrough at the time because everybody wanted to celebrate Dr. King no matter what side of the fence you're on with nuclear weapons." LaForge gave the button to the MP.^{xx}

Activist Groups – Beliefs and Mission

Individuals and groups protesting the nuclear build up during the Cold War acted for a variety of reasons. Some, such as Joe and Jean Gump, participated in actions that damaged silos in Missouri in 1986 and 1987. The Gumps and other individuals did not have any organizational affiliation and protested out of personal religious conviction.^{xxi} Some organized groups also acted out of religious beliefs. The Ploughshares organization based its activism on the biblical reference to hammering swords into ploughshares.^{xxii} The group's activism lay grounded in its members' belief that nuclear weapons were and remain instruments of mass murder.

Some activists objected to nuclear weapons for fear of the environmental consequences of a nuclear accident involving the nuclear

material or concerns with future cleanup of nuclear waste. Others, like John LaForge and Nukewatch, adhered to the legal argument that the proliferation of nuclear missiles, with their ability to annihilate whole populations, violated the Geneva Convention and the Nuremberg Charter.^{xxiii}

In general, anti-nuclear groups endorsed nonviolent actions aimed at increasing public awareness of the potential dangers of nuclear weapons. Activists hoped that increased awareness would result in the public outcry necessary to disarm nuclear weapons arsenals. Their typically pacifist views, which recalled non-violent protests in Ghandi's India or America's own civil rights marches as models, contributed to the generally peaceful and non-confrontational tone of their protests.

Efforts in South Dakota (1980-90s)

South Dakota's peace movement did not agitate to the same extent as its neighbor North Dakota. In reflecting on the beginnings of anti-nuclear peace activism in South Dakota, long-time peace activist and resident of Rapid City, Jay Davis stated, "The nuclear arms race specifically organizing against that really started to gain steam during the Reagan presidency at the very early 80s and really continued throughout the Reagan presidency and then when President Bush came in 1989 it wasn't long after that that you had the end of the Cold War and all that. Which made this particular issue somewhat moot. It's easy to forget how intense the people felt and how scary things were at times during the 80s."^{xxiv}

Jay Davis also reflected that residents of South Dakota and Rapid City in particular have generally been very supportive of their Air Force base. Residents of the state are keenly aware of the economic benefits they enjoy as the result of the military presence on the state's Western Plains, and the military program received substantial local and statewide political support. Peace movement adherents in South Dakota recognized quite early that they were outnumbered by those who supported local military installations.^{xxv}

It is difficult to determine the number of South Dakota residents that identified with or joined the peace movement. Jay Davis stated, "Well we never had as much [activism] in South Dakota as the more urban states so we had that perspective. We were kind of the country cousins to a peace movement that was

much more prominent on the east and west coasts in bigger cities. We certainly had our own branch of it and I'd say it maybe hit its peak from about 1982 to about 1987. So that would be most of the Reagan era."^{xxvi}

Local support of the increased military presence at Ellsworth Air Force Base was not universal, however. Individual acts of resistance included rock art symbols placed at the end of the runway at Ellsworth by Marv Kammerer and fellow activists. Kammerer, described by Jay Davis as a "rancher for peace," owns land adjoining Ellsworth Air Force

Base.^{xxvii} During the Cold War, Kammerer placed three symbols on his land at the end of the runway to signal his objection to nuclear weapons—a peace sign, a Native American earth symbol, and an ecology symbol.

The South Dakota Peace and Justice Center, an organization of "preachers, teachers, and social workers," arranged missile silo demonstrations throughout the state during the 1980s.^{xxviii} They were responsible for coordinating Easter Sunday protests at missile silo sites, events that involved prayer vigils and communion. After the services ended, a small group of pre-selected activists trained in nonviolent action trespassed onto the silo sites, sometimes placing an Easter lily on the silo cap. These events were intended to raise the level of public debate about the weapons and to make a statement about the appropriateness of building and maintaining these weapons systems.^{xxix}

The Easter Sunday protests occurred at numerous missile launch facility sites in South Dakota, including at Delta-09 in 1987. Four people trespassed onto the silo site that day and were arrested. The federal magistrate decided to make an example of this group of protestors, fining them \$525 each, for a total fine of \$2,100. Members of the South Dakota Peace and Justice Center felt obligated to help the protestors pay their fine. However, according to Jay Davis, the South Dakota Peace and Justice Center did not have money in the bank to cover the fines, placing the burden of payment on the members. These fines caused protestors in South Dakota to rethink their methods, and effectively put an end to trespass actions in South Dakota.^{xxx}

When asked to describe the overall impact of the anti-nuclear protests in South Dakota, Jay Davis responded, "Well, I think if we hadn't been there people would have absolutely taken the missile silos for granted. Those silos are there to preserve peace. At worst, they're a necessary evil. At best they help our local economy and by having protests which were broadcast to the state and to the community and the news media people at least became aware of the fact that there is another side to the story. ...So we provided balance in a conservative area of the country during a very conservative time."^{xxxi}

Continued Activism

Over the years, protestors met with a mixed reaction from the public and anti-nuclear/peace groups in the United States and Europe. The public remained divided on the issue of maintaining the United States' nuclear force, while peace groups could not agree on either the utility or the ethics of damaging government property. Local press coverage ranged from matter-of-fact to openly hostile, accusing the protestors of being unpatriotic or un-American.^{xxxii}

Individuals and groups protested the Cold War's nuclear buildup and continue to oppose the very existence of nuclear weapons for a variety of reasons. Religious, legal, and environmental arguments remain central to the agitation for American and international disarmament. The 550 ICBMs still in the ground remain a focus for the peace activists.^{xxxiii} Today, debate continues to rage throughout the activist community over the usefulness of employing tactics involving property

damage to missile silo sites or trespassing onto the sites. European activists have raised concerns over the jail sentences received by American activists and question the effectiveness of a peace movement that suffers from having many of its leaders in jail. For example, the long sentence of Helen Dery Woodson, a member of the Silo Pruning Hooks who received an eighteen-year jail sentence for trespassing onto a silo Launch Facility and damaging the silo, illustrates the toll of the peace movement on the lives of individuals.^{xxxiv}

A new tactic employed by the activist groups since the 1990s centers on posing as weapons inspectors and they have attempted to inspect weapon sites in Europe and the United States. To John LaForge, of Nukewatch, these inspections "highlight the hypocrisy of these first world nuclear arm states as well as a way to bring attention to the deployment of the weapons all over the place."^{xxxv} For peace activists opposing nuclear weapons, the battle for disarmament continues.

The Cold War, however, has ended. Gone with it are the bipolar tensions that divided the international system for nearly a half century. We next turn to the dismantling of those international tensions and the concurrent dismantling of Minuteman.



Plate 72. Peace March in Peetz, Colorado, Good Friday 1988. Nukewatch founder Sam Day (left) is holding the banner (Courtesy of Nukewatch, photograph by Peetz News Weekly)



Plate 73. Spring Equinox Vigil, 1988. Banner reads, "U.S. Air Force: Good People Bad Product" (Courtesy of Nukewatch, photograph by John LaForge)



Plate 74. World War II munitions bunkers now used to store farm produce and equipment, near Bronson, Nebraska, 1988 (Courtesy of Nukewatch, photograph by Barb Katt)

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- ⁱ Rosenbaum, "Brief History of the 44th Strategic Missile Wing," 2.
- ⁱⁱ Samuel H. Day, ed., *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States* (McFarland, Wisc.: Progressive Foundation, 1988), 19.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 21.
- ^{iv} Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 20.
- ^v Paul S. Boyer, "From Activism to Apathy: The American People and Nuclear Weapons, 1963-1980," *The Journal of American History* 70, no. 4 (March 1984): 829-830.
- ^{vi} Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 21.
- ^{vii} Michael Mandelbaum, "The Anti-Nuclear Weapons Movements," *PS* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 27-28.
- ^{viii} Mandelbaum, "The Anti-Nuclear Weapons Movements," 25-26.
- ^{ix} Davis, interview, 1-2.
- ^x Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 22.
- ^{xi} Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 21.
- ^{xii} John LaForge, interview by Mead & Hunt, Inc., typed transcript, 3 January 2003, 10.
- ^{xiii} Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 23.
- ^{xiv} Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 23.
- ^{xv} Davis, interview, 4.
- ^{xvi} Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 53-54.
- ^{xvii} Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 6-7.
- ^{xviii} Davis, interview, 9.
- ^{xix} LaForge, interview, 10.
- ^{xx} LaForge, interview, 10.
- ^{xxi} Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 24.
- ^{xxii} Isa. 2:4.
- ^{xxiii} LaForge, interview, 8-9; Friends for a Nonviolent World, "A Caution, and an Appeal, to the Personnel of the Minuteman Missile Launch Control System," (Bemidji, Minn.: Friends for a Nonviolent World, 15 January 1989).
- ^{xxiv} Davis, interview, 5.
- ^{xxv} Davis, interview, 9.
- ^{xxvi} Davis, interview, 5.
- ^{xxvii} Davis, interview, 9.
- ^{xxviii} Davis, interview, 2.
- ^{xxix} Davis, interview, 2.
- ^{xxx} Davis, interview, 8.
- ^{xxxi} Davis, interview, 12.
- ^{xxxii} LaForge, interview, 11.
- ^{xxxiii} LaForge, interview, 16.
- ^{xxxiv} LaForge, interview, 12; Day, *Nuclear Heartland: A Guide to the 1,000 Missile Silos in the United States*, 23-24.
- ^{xxxv} LaForge, interview, 15.